

FRENCHMAN LOOKS FOR LAMPETER RAF MAN – 60 YEARS AFTER CRASH

The commemorations for D-Day may be over, but for one Frenchman, his quest is only just beginning – to find relatives of an RAF crew who went down with their plane in his home region sixty years ago.

M Jean-Luc Prieur, 41, of Veron, near Sens, a small city 120 kilometres south of Paris is looking for any surviving relatives of the crew of JB 701, a Lancaster of 49 squadron which was shot down over northern France on July 29 1944, after a bombing operation on Stuttgart, Germany.

In the plane that day were:

- Pilot, Flight Lieutenant **William Leonard Powell**, aged 22 of Croydon, Surrey,
- Flight Engineer, Sergeant **John Frederick West**, aged 29 of Altrincham, Cheshire,
- Navigator, Flying Officer **Geoffrey Edward Franklin**, aged 31 of Lampeter, Cardiganshire,
- Air Bomber, Flying Officer **Albert Stanley Cole**, aged 21 of Hastings, Sussex,
- Air Gunner, Sergeant **George Edward Kirkpatrick**, aged 30, of Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire,
- Wireless Operator, Flight Sergeant **Donald Carl Stephens**, of Truro, Cornwall, and
- Air Gunner, Sergeant **Thomas Moore**, home town unknown.

All of them perished when the plane came down and crashed between the villages of St Martin sur Oreuse and La Chapelle sur Oreuse, in the French department of l' Yonne, northern France. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant William Leonard Powell managed to avoid civilian casualties, by bringing the plane down at the side of the road connecting the two villages.

The remains of the crew were laid to rest in the cemetery at St Martin sur Oreuse, where their graves are now cared for by local people and maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

However, M Jean-Luc Prieur, is determined that their heroic efforts on what turned out to be their final operation with bomber command are never forgotten.

"My grandfather, Alfred Prieur, was 37 years old and a father of three in June 1940, when he commenced his activities in the French resistance," explained Jean-Luc. "It was quite rare in the early days of the war, to find someone as committed to and as active in, the fight against the occupying forces, as my grandfather was."

Alfred in fact, not only helped prisoners of war on the run, he also assisted draft evaders from obligatory work service in Germany and succeeded in helping two British airmen to be repatriated through an escape line.

But unfortunately, he was ultimately betrayed on 13 October 1943 and reported to the Nazi authorities, who deported him to Buchenwald, and then to the infamous Dora Tunnel, where the Germans were using forced labour

to manufacture V1 and V2 rockets.

He survived nearly 18 months of almost intolerable living and working conditions, but his spirit of resistance never gave out on him. He managed to sabotage some of the work he did on the assembly line, thereby ensuring that the rockets never reached their desired targets, of which London was certainly the prime one.

Jean-Luc, his grandson, who runs his own private museum from his house in Veron – his grandfather's striped concentration camp vest takes pride of place amongst the exhibits – is acutely aware of the essential part that allied aircrew played in the liberation of his homeland. It is for this reason that he is so preoccupied with ensuring that the history of this period is never forgotten.

In fact, his dedication to the cause runs so deep that he has started a campaign to commemorate the location of crash sites by the erection of memorials, most of which he has funded himself.

The negotiations to erect a memorial to commemorate the crew of Lancaster JB 701 are reaching their final stages. The inauguration has been set for 31 July 2004, just two days after the 60th anniversary of the crash and Jean-Luc has set himself the task of finding any surviving relatives of the airmen so that he can invite them to attend the ceremony in person.

However, time is running out and next of kin details are unobtainable from the War Graves Commission. He is therefore appealing to local people who may know the whereabouts of any surviving relatives of Geoffrey Edward Franklin the navigator on board.

His father and mother were George and Frances of Lampeter, Cardiganshire. He was 31 and married to Alberta Margaret.

Should anyone have any details that would enable any surviving relatives to be traced, they are asked to contact the Western Mail, in the first instance, and details will be passed on to a British researcher who is helping Jean-Luc in his quest.

- Ends -

Further information from:

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Photos: No crew photo currently available. Could illustrate article with photo of Jean-Luc at a similar memorial to a crashed Lancaster at St Agnan in May 2004. He's pictured with the sister of one of the airmen. She was thrilled by Jean-Luc's efforts to erect the memorial at the crash site and was able to see her brother's grave for the first time, after searching for it for more than 30 years. Let me know if you would like the picture – Jean-Luc could email it to you.